

Remarks of Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL)
Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs
Hearing on “Foreign Policy Priorities in the Obama Administration”
April 22, 2009

Madam Secretary, I join the Chairman in welcoming you before the Committee today.

This is an era of profound challenges and also of important opportunities to advance an agenda of freedom, prosperity and security.

However, if this weekend’s Summit of the Americas is any indication, we’re off to a troublesome start.

The Summit served as a forum for despotic leaders to attack democratic values and free market principles, and for proclaiming their radical vision as the way forward for the Hemisphere.

Many of those repressive leaders decided to make the Cuban dictatorship’s return to the Inter-American system, the pillar of their agenda.

The OAS Secretary General supports this proposal, ignoring the fact that the Cuban regime is in violation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter and the American Convention on Human Rights.

Sadly, some responsible nations failed to counter the efforts by Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez, Nicaragua’s Ortega, their fellow rogues and enablers, to subvert the freedom agenda, while diverting attention away from their own assault on democratic institutions, freedom of the press and association, and the opposition in their countries.

The Summit reminded me of the discussions at the UN Human Rights Council or at the Durban 2 Conference taking place this week in Geneva.

Despite clear indications that Durban 2 would be a reaffirmation of the anti-Semitic, anti-Israel, anti-freedom hate-fest of its predecessor, many waited until the last minute to announce they were boycotting.

For some, it took Iran’s Ahmadinejad spewing his venom to awaken them from their stupor.

The U.S. cannot stand idly by and allow such manipulation to take place, particularly when U.S. taxpayer funds are at stake.

Many Americans are struggling to make ends meet.

We must therefore ensure that we can justify our funding for international organizations and foreign affairs activities.

The recently submitted Supplemental is a case and point. The request for \$95 million to provide heavy fuel oil and unspecified energy assistance to North Korea and the over \$34 million for dismantlement efforts is troublesome.

Years of negotiations with the North Korean regime have resulted in an increase rather than a reduction of the threat it poses, as underscored by its April 5th rocket launch.

Pyongyang's announced intention to resume its plutonium bomb-making efforts, combined with its uranium enrichment, clearly demonstrate that North Korea has viewed the Six Party Talks as a means of advancing its nuclear weapons development.

But North Korea's weapons drive has implications beyond Pyongyang.

Syria was reportedly close to completing a nuclear facility built with North Korean assistance when an Israeli strike destroyed it in September 2007.

There have also been ongoing reports about North Korea-Iran missile cooperation.

And, just a few weeks ago, news reports cited Western intelligence concerns that a ship that traveled from North Korea to Iran may have had tons of enriched uranium hidden in its cargo—material which could be used for nuclear weapons.

Iran and Syria are closely watching how we deal with North Korea.

I fear they will conclude that we will treat them as generously as we do Pyongyang in the proposed Supplemental.

Another item of grave concern is the Administration's plan to provide more than \$900 million in aid for West Bank and Gaza.

In Gaza, this is tantamount to a bailout for Hamas.

Reassurances that the aid will go through nongovernmental organizations, and not to Hamas, ignore the reality that there is only one ultimate distributor and guarantor of aid in Gaza: Hamas.

Dumping money into Gaza reconstruction enables Hamas to reconsolidate its political standing in Gaza without cost -- freeing up Hamas funds to buy rockets and other arms.

NGOs and international organizations do not have adequate vetting and internal controls to ensure that aid is not going to extremists, and United Nations Relief and Works Agency continues to do business with banks that the United States has targeted for laundering Islamist militants' money.

I also am concerned about the seemingly broad interpretation in the Supplemental of the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act waiver and implications for a PA that includes Hamas.

It appears to ignore requirements for the dismantlement of the Islamist militant infrastructure and halting of incitement, before a PA effectively controlled by Hamas can be eligible for U.S. funding.

In Afghanistan, we all share the goal of ensuring that sanctions and safe haven no longer exist for those who want to do us harm.

However, it appears from the G-20 summit, that many of our European allies are unwilling to assume any real burden to help prevent that from happening.

I welcomed the Administration's release of its strategic review of U.S. policy in Afghanistan and the President's outline of next steps.

I am committed to ensuring our personnel on the ground have the support and resources to succeed in their mission. But we need more details, particularly on the civilian surge and non-security, development assistance.

Madam Secretary, I am greatly concerned about reports that the administration may have changed policies on investigating and possibly prosecuting former administration officials.

This is an extremely negative development when we need to work together to counter extreme Islamist militants who seek our destruction.

Ultimately, we must not miss any more opportunities to prove to rogue regimes and tyrants that the U.S. will defend freedom and democracy.

As Edmund Burke would say: "All that is required for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing."